

Sonoma Coast State Beach General Plan

Workshop Gathers Public Input on Willow Creek Concepts and Access Possibilities

Approximately 55 people attended the General Plan Workshop for the recently acquired Upper Willow Creek Addition. Thanks to all who attended and shared their ideas about the future for this new important addition to Sonoma Coast State Beach. The meeting was held at the Sebastopol Veteran's Memorial Building on the evening of September 13, 2006. Planning concepts, goals for long-range management as well as potential access and use of the Willow Creek area were presented by the Department and the public provided review responses and input. All of the public input ideas and concerns are being considered in the development of General Plan concepts and guidelines for the future public use and management of this exciting new area of the park. The following summary highlights some of the ideas and comments presented by meeting participants:

- As noted in the EDAW Access Study, numerous professional studies are needed to address environmental, special status species, geotechnical, traffic and circulation, safety, and fire safety issues prior to any potential park development in Upper Willow Creek and Coleman Valley Road. A park staffing plan for park security is also needed.
- Adjacent landowner has liability concern regarding a pond (near a potential park access), access to pond is currently fenced off. The more the general public sees this pond, the more people may want to swim in the pond – potentially placing landowner with responsibility “to police the pond”.
- Visitor use demand for proposed Coleman Valley Road access parking lot will exceed 7 or 8 spaces, lot will fill up and resulting overflow parking on the road will create traffic hazards, near a blind curve. Coleman Road is national scenic route, why create huge parking lots where roads can't accommodate it. Access to Willow Creek should be from the lower portion of the park.
- Longtime equestrians have access to Willow Creek Road and walk horses into park. They once had access to (potential Upper Willow Creek) site A, but this did not work, it was difficult and neighbors didn't like it. Upper Willow Creek Road is too narrow for horse trailers. There are other access points near Big Creek and at Richard Boxman's. Even the Freezeout access location is too small for horse trailers.

- Resident commends parks department on plan works – these people know what they are doing, they are professionals. Coleman Valley residents had to put roadblocks in front of timber trucks...(resident) doesn't want to put road blocks in front of the parks department.
- Proposed Coleman Valley Road parking area is across resident's house who doesn't think it's ugly or too big.
- Trails Plan (should be prioritized) above resource restoration. There was a problem with premature resource restoration. Want to make sure that access is not eliminated by overzealous resource restoration, would like to see the two disciplines work together.
- Sharing is the most efficient way to use trails. Mountain bicyclists have the most flexibility and equestrians have the biggest challenge. Please include adequate studies for equestrians needs both at upper and lower end.
- Make a provision for including livestock grazing into the park somehow, although not suggesting to open it (park management) up as an open door policy for grazing. Heavy grazing is damaging to the land, but grasslands evolved with grazing and grazing is needed as a technique to maintain these open grasslands. Grazing has been traditionally used on our coast for over 100 years. Some families have had grazing on parks land for over 50 years. Would like to see this continued at some level. Agriculture is part of our heritage and grazing is part of that. Local and regional food production is important and grazing is part of this, and should be considered. Should include this in the cultural analysis for the General Plan.
- Multiuse trails advocate feels Upper Willow Creek Road does not look adequate for equestrian use. Upper part (potential access locations) needs a really good study. Proposed parking lots lead to MRC lands. Every weekend, lots of people are seen on MRC land and not on DPR land. Maybe the state could do some purchasing.
- Early equestrian permit holder from MRC hardly goes anymore (to Willow Creek watershed) since being directed to the Freezeout trailhead. (Equestrian trail access from Freezeout trailhead is difficult.) From Freezeout you have to walk your horse up 1000 feet (elevation) before you can get anywhere. Park needs some good maps to avoid confusion. Trail user gets lots of emails from Landpaths asking people not to park on Willow Creek Road.
- Studies from west Marin County (on grazing) indicate that diversity in bunch grasses and native wildflowers go down when grazing is eliminated.

How local is our food? Global warming is real and local food can help with this.

- Offsite parking – there are possibilities if we look outside the box, such as further down Willow Creek Road where horses could go up road (from the lower access location). There are geological hazards at site A, B and C – large serpentine outcrop will make it hard and expensive to maintain the road.
- Lower Willow Creek – the valley is filling with sediment. Backfilling with sediment from Russian River when mouth is clogged. Limited options at bridge sites. Permits – don't leave out RWQCB – they have quite a bit of jurisdiction, wetlands are present on road to site A.
- Concern about traffic increase on Lower Willow Creek Road because of significant soil slippage between State Highway 1 and the first gate. Road currently accommodates lots of traffic by DPR, campers etc. and the road is already at peak capacity. Opposition to establishing public access at Upper Willow Creek Road creates concern about additional/increased visitor use pressure on Lower Willow Creek access.
- Everyone states that horse trailers should be at the Pomo Environmental campground location (equestrians were excluded in original plan) now they have been grandfathered in by Landpaths. Park access needs to be distributed to several locations. Freezeout Creek is best access for horses. Hikers should have some trails reserved for them.
- Grazing is allowed in some State Parks – support continuation of the Baxman family grazing lease.
- Disappointment with table 1 and 2 in the Access Study describing impacts of site study. Study wasn't descriptive enough – would like to emphasize that any additional study be clear and descriptive so we can all understand what it means. Change in park status will create impacts on local community – who will pay for the bills. This process needs to be interactive with local community – need to participate in any decision making. Notion of creating a beautiful landscape for people is laudable.
- Residents recognize its beauty – diverse habitats, quaint 1864 schoolhouse, old ranch house, free range cattle; it's a natural and cultural resource of California. It (Coleman Valley Road) is one of the most popular cycling roads in the County. The mission statement of state parks is protection of such a place. Mission statement will be fulfilled best by not developing a parking lot. Parking lots will increase traffic, especially on weekends. This will affect hikers and agricultural activities. Resident opposition was stated two years ago in letters to the county when we first

heard about this proposal. Reason for opposing (parking lots or park access is that) residents are hoping to have Coleman Valley Road designated a national scenic road.

- All statements applicable to Upper Willow Creek Road are also applicable to Coleman Valley Road, upper Willow Creek Road people have connections. Coleman Valley Road is not the sacrificial lamb.
- The park is a treasure and resident is proud to support the park. Discussion of public park access should include the word “safe.” Willow Creek Road is far too narrow and Coleman Valley Road is mostly too narrow for park access. Should prioritize access by safety criteria. There are lots of geologic instability issues at these access locations.
- Fire danger is a big danger. You cannot regulate stupidity and people will make bad choices. Grazing is an appropriate use for the park, cattle are mother nature’s weed whackers. Applaud the Baxman’s stewardship. Original permit holder at MRC has never had a bad cattle encounter.
- Please focus on Freezeout Creek Road and lower Willow Creek Road for public park access.
- Agreement among neighbors that this is a precious place (Willow Creek) and it will take a lot to protect it. Many access points are needed to spread the impacts. Sedimentation is caused by Willow Creek Road itself. Surprise that Sonoma County did not improve situation when they fixed Willow Creek Road.
- Agree that grazing should be employed to reduce fire hazards and preserve biodiversity. It is used at other parks and would address a lot of issues. Management zones lines don’t follow watershed boundary, don’t just follow old property lines. Look at other potential access points as well, especially small ones.
- Although Coleman Valley Road is a popular cycling route, it can be dangerous, particularly concerning vehicles with horse trailers being able to go up the grade. More vehicle traffic on the road would increase danger.
- After Willow Creek watershed access points are established, more people will come from inland and try to use upper access points. This will be exacerbated by flooding in lower Willow Creek (that temporarily makes lower watershed access locations inaccessible). Should investigate additional access points off of park land – on MRC property for example. The sooner parking decisions and the timetable for when these will go in are finalized, the sooner the Trails Plan can be finalized.

- Local residents know the land well from looking over Timber Harvest Plans (THP) for years. The land needs to heal. Siltation at bridges needs to be addressed. Parking spaces for equestrian traffic at lower end are inappropriate. Public has the right to include public access before the land is healed. Don't mandate lower end as primary access. Access needs to be distributed. Equestrians could go to Freezeout. Fire hazards are huge. People who want to overabuse the park through access need to think about this (resource rehabilitation and public use issues). Resident presents a gift (garlic) to new state park superintendent (Todd Thames).
- An advocate for horse riding feels upper Willow Creek Road is inappropriate for horse trailers (not enough space).
- Landpaths member has hiked all over the state and the Willow Creek area is some of the most gorgeous lands ever seen. Everybody should have an opportunity to enjoy it but there are lots of problems (to establishing public access and use).

What's Next in the Planning Process

Input received at the September 13, 2006 public meeting was considered in evaluating planning alternatives for the Willow Creek area of Sonoma Coast State Beach. Preferred concepts and goals for long-range management and use have been determined and incorporated into an updated Preliminary General Plan and Draft EIR that includes the recent Willow Creek addition. **This Updated Preliminary General Plan and Draft EIR will be available for public review in January 2007.** Following this CEQA public review and comment period, the Preliminary Plan/Final EIR will then be submitted to the State Parks and Recreation Commission for their consideration and approval. This public hearing is currently anticipated for May 2007.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list to receive notification of hearings and planning updates, please contact Rick Royer at the Russian River District Office at rroye@parks.ca.gov or phone 707-869-2356.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the Sonoma Coast State Beach General Plan.

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